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DR. ROHLFS' EXPLORATION OF THE LIBYAN DESERT.

Synopsis of the Remarks of DR. GERHARD ROHLFS,
Before the Society.

When, in the winter of 1873, Dr. Rohlfs set out from Germany for the purpose of exploring the Libyan Desert, his principal object was to determine the question as to the correctness of the discovery made by him in 1869, of the depression which extends from the Great Syrte as far as Egypt, and also to determine whether the *Behar bela Nea* (river bed without water) has an actual existence, and if so, whether the Nile, in prehistoric times, could have pursued a westward course through it to the sea. In order to decide both these important questions, Rohlfs resolved to push forward from the Nile, strike through the Libyan Desert, and, if possible, to reach the oasis of Kufra.

The khedive of Egypt furnished the means for the expedition in the most generous manner, and his generosity deserves special commendation, the more so for the reason that the questions to be decided were purely scientific.

In order to make the expedition as useful as possible, Rohlfs determined to surround himself with specialists in the different branches of science, and he succeeded in a short time in securing the assistance of gentlemen known not only in Germany but in all Europe as scholars of the first rank in their particular professions. Professor Ascherson, of the University of Berlin, accompanied the expedition as botanist; Professor Littell, of the University of Munich, as geologist and paleontologist; Professor Jordan, of the Polytechnic Institute of Carlsruhe, as professor of geodesy and astronomy; and G. Remelé, of Rhenish, Prussia, as photographer.

The expedition set out from Cairo in December, 1873, furnished with a splendid equipment. To this there belonged, among other things, 500 iron water-chests, enameled inside, which enabled the expedition to take along 50,000 pounds of water at once. Previous to their departure the khedive received the members of the expedition. The Egyptian Institute, presided over by the learned Mariette Bey, also gave them a reception.

The expedition ascended the Nile as far as Siout in a steamer provided by the khedive. From this point Rohlfs and his companions with 140 camels, set out, in a westwardly direction, into the unknown interior of the mysterious Libyan Desert. They marched eleven days over a plateau 400 meters in height, perfectly bare, and without a sign of life or vegetation. They found themselves, at the end of eleven days, on the edge of a declivity, at the foot of which, 150 meters below, lay the little oasis of Farafrah. You may readily imagine the astonishment and terror which struck the inhabitants of this oasis, only 200 in number, when they suddenly beheld so large a caravan moving upon their town. As this oasis afforded no resources to the expedition, they proceeded hence towards the south, and after a march of seven days they reached the oasis of Dachel, which contains 12,000 inhabitants, and is the most populous in the Libyan Desert. They stayed here a short time and then proceeded further towards the west. Sand hills, in parallel chains, 150 meters in height, and from 100 to 150 kilometers in length, with intervening spaces of from two to five kilometers, obstructed further progress towards the west. Accordingly, it was decided to take a north-north-west direction, with the hope of reaching the oasis of Jupiter Ammon. After a march, which is without precedent in the history of African exploration, with no guide but the compass, sextant and theodolite, finding no water during an interrupted period of fifteen days, they finally reached the celebrated oasis of Alexander the Great.

As another *Behar bela Nea*, marked upon the map, had here to be explored, Dr. Jordan left the expedition at this point and undertook this task. The expedition returned to Farafrah, unassisted by guides or by designated roads or paths, and was soon joined by Dr. Jordan, who in the meantime had visited the oasis of Beharigh. Thus the principal objects of the expedition were accomplished, and it returned by the way of Dachel and Chargeh to Esuch on the Nile, and thence down the river to Cairo.

The results of the expedition, as laid before the Egyptian Institute, which assembled to receive the report of the explorers, are substantially as follows :

1. A *Behar bela Nea*, as a continuous empty river bed, does not exist. Consequently the Nile, in pre-historic times, has occupied its old river bed.

2. The Libyan Desert does not participate in the depression which extends northward from it.

3. This depression is established as true by exact measurement; in other words, as a depression, on an average, twenty-five meters below the level of the Mediterranean Sea.

Furthermore, the Libyan Desert was exhaustively explored, botanically, geologically and paleontologically, and the collections made are so numerous that all the museums may be supplied. All the principal points of the Desert were astronomically determined, and more than a hundred measurements of elevations taken. The Egyptian temple in Dachel was excavated and photographed in detail. The interesting hieroglyphic writings and sculptures have been translated and are described by Professor Lepsius in the *Magazine for Egyptology*, published in Leipsic by Hinrichs.

Aside from numerous monographs contributed by the members of the expedition to various periodicals, a splendid album of photographs from the Libyan Desert has been issued at the expense of the khedive, a copy of which has been presented by Dr. Rohlfs to the American Geographical Society. The members of the expedition are engaged upon an elaborate work, which will be the product of their united labors. The first volume, with a description of the expedition by Dr. Rohlfs, and with contributions by Ascherson, Jordan and Littel, has already appeared. The succeeding volumes will be as follows: 2. Botany by Ascherson. 3. Geography and Ethnography by Rohlfs. 4. Geodasy and Astronomy by Jordan. 5. Geology and Paleontology by Littel. A copy of the entire work will be presented to the American Geographical Society.